

VI. *An Account of the Turkey.* By Thomas Pennant, *Esq.*
F. R. S.; communicated by Joseph Banks, *Esq.* P. R. S.

Read December 21, 1781.

TURKEY. BILL convex, short and strong.

HEAD and neck covered with a naked tuberose flesh, with a long fleshy appendage hanging from the base of the upper mandible.

ON the breast a long tuft of coarse black hairs.

Wild Turkey. JOSSELYN's Voy. 99. Rarities 8. CLAYTON's Virgin: Phil. Transf. abridged, III. 590. LAWSON, 149. CATESBY Topp. XLIV.

Le coq d'Inde, BELON 248.

Gallo-pavo, GESNER Av. 481. Icon. 56.

Gallo-pavo, ALDROV. Av. 11. 18.

Gallo-pavo, the Turkey, A. 3. Gallo-pavo sylvestris Novæ Angliæ, a New England wild Turkey, RAII Synopsis Avium 51.

Meleagris Gallo-pavo. M. capite caruncula frontali gularique, maris pectore barbato, LIN. Syft. 268.

Le Dindon de BUFFON III. BRISSON. I. 158. tab. XVI. Pl. Enl. 97.

Description. T. with the characters described in the definition of the genus. The plumage, dark glossed with variable copper colour, and green. Coverts of the wings and the quill feathers barred with black and white. Tail consists of two orders. The upper or shorter very elegant, the ground colour a bright bay; the middle feather marked with numerous bars of shining black and green. The greatest part of the exterior feathers of the same ground with the others marked with three broad bands of mallard green, placed remote from each other. The two next are coloured like those of the middle; but the end is plain and crossed with a single bar, like the exterior.

The longer or lower order are of a rusty white colour, mottled with black; and crossed with numerous narrow-waved lines of the same colour, and near the end with a broad band.

Wild Turkeys preserve a sameness of colouring; the tame, as usual with domestic animals, vary. It is needless to point out the differences in so well known a bird: the black approaches nearest to the original stock. This variety I have seen nearly in a state of nature in Richmond and other parks. A most beautiful kind has of late been introduced into England of a snowy whiteness, finely contrasting with its red head. These, I think, came out of Holland, probably bred from an accidental white pair; and from them preserved pure from any dark or variegated birds.

Size.

Size.

The sizes of the wild Turkeys have been differently represented. Some writers assert, that there have been instances of their weighing sixty pounds; but I find none who, speaking from their own knowledge, can prove their weight to be above forty. JOSSELYN says, that he has eaten part of a cock, which after it was plucked, and the entrails taken out, weighed thirty*. LAWSON, whose authority is unquestionable, saw half a Turkey serve eight hungry men for two meals†; and says, that he had seen others which he believed weighed forty pounds. CATESBY tells us, that out of the many hundreds which he had handled‡, very few exceeded thirty pounds; each of these speak of their being double that size merely from the reports of others.

Manners.

The manners of these birds are as singular as their figure. Their attitudes in the season of courtship are very striking. The males fling their heads and neck backwards, bristle up their feathers, drop their wings to the ground, strut and pace most ridiculously; wheel round the females with their wings rustling along the earth, at the same time emitting a strange sound through their nostrils not unlike the *Grurr* of a great spinning wheel. On being interrupted they fly into great rages, and change their notes into a loud and guttural gobble,

Notes.

* New England Rarities, p. 8.

† History of Carolina, p. 149. and 27.

‡ App. XLIV. The greatest certain weight is given by Mr. CLAYTON, who saw one that reached 38 lbs. Phil. Trans.

and then return to dalliance. The sound of the female is plaintive and melancholy.

Irafcible.

The passions of the males are very strongly expressed by the change of colours in the fleshy substance of the head and neck, which alters to red, white, blue, and yellowish, as they happen to be affected. The sight of any thing red excites their choler greatly.

Polygamous.

They are polygamous, one cock serving many hens. They lay in the spring, and produce a great number of eggs. They will persist in laying for a great while. They retire to some obscure place to sit, the cock through rage at the loss of its mate being very apt to break the eggs. The females are very affectionate to their young, and make great moan on the loss of them. They sit on their eggs with such perseverance, that if they are not taken away when addle, the hens will almost perish with hunger before they will quit the nest.

Turkies greatly delight in the seeds of nettles; but those of the purple-fox glove prove fatal to them*.

Turkies are very stupid birds, quarrelsome, and cowardly. It is diverting to see a whole flock attack the common cock, who will, for a long time, keep a great number at bay.

Swift.
Perch
high.

They are very swift runners in the tame as well as the wild state: they are but indifferent flyers. They love to perch on trees, and gain the height

* DE BUFFON.

they wish by rising from bough to bough. In a wild state they get to the very summit of the loftiest trees, even so high as to be beyond the reach of the musquet*.

Gregarious. In the state of nature they go in flocks even of five hundred †, feed much on the small red acorns, and grow so fat in *March* that they cannot fly more than three or four hundred yards, and are soon ran down by a horseman. In the unfrequented parts bordering on the *Mississipi*, they are so tame as to be shot with even a pistol ‡.

Haunts. They frequent the great swamps § of their native country, and leave them at sun-rising to repair to the dry woods in search of acorns and berries; and before sun-set retire to the swamps to roost.

The flesh of the wild Turkey is said to be superior in goodness to the tame, but redder. Eggs of the former have been taken from the nest, and hatched under tame Turkies. The young will still prove wild, perch separate, yet mix and breed together in the season. The Indians sometimes use the breed produced from the wild as decoy birds to seduce those in a state of nature within their reach ||.

* LAWSON, 45.

† ADAIR's Amer. 360.

‡ LAWSON, 149.

§ It is in the swamps that the loftiest and most bulky trees are. The wet with which they are environed makes them a secure retreat.

|| LAWSON, 149.

Wild Turkies are now grown most excessively rare in the inhabited parts of *America*, and are only found in numbers in the distant and most unfrequented spots.

The Indians make a most elegant cloathing of the feathers. They twist the inner webs into a strong double thread of hemp, or inner bark of the mulberry tree, and work it like matting; it appears very rich and glossy, and as fine as a silk shag*. They also make fans of the tail; and the French of *Louisiana* were wont to make umbrellas by the junction of four of the tails†.

When disturbed, they do not take wing, but run out of sight. It is usual to chase them with dogs, when they will fly and perch on the next tree. They are so stupid or so insensible of danger, as not to fly on being shot at; but the survivors remain unmoved at the death of their companions‡.

Place.

Turkies are natives only of *America*, or the New World, and of course unknown to the ancients. Since both these positions have been denied by some of the most eminent naturalists of the sixteenth century, I beg leave to lay open, in as few words as possible, the cause of their error.

Mistaken
by BELON.

BELON §, the earliest of those writers who are of opinion that these birds were natives of the

* LAWSON, 18. ADAIR, 423.

† DU PRATZ, II. 85.

‡ DU PRATZ, 224.

§ Hist. des Oys. 248.

old world, founds his notion on the description of the Guinea fowl, the Meleagrides of STRABO, ATHENÆUS, PLINY, and others of the ancients. I rest the refutation on the excellent account given by ATHENÆUS, taken from CLYTUS MILESIUS, a disciple of ARISTOTLE, which can suit no other than that fowl. “They want,” says he, “natural affection towards their young; their head is naked, and on the top is a hard round body like a peg or nail: from their cheeks hangs a red piece of flesh like a beard. It has no wattles like the common poultry. The feathers are black, spotted with white. They have no spurs; and both sexes are so like as not to be distinguished by the sight.” VARRO * and PLINY † take notice of the spotted plumage and the gibbous substance on the head. ATHENÆUS is more minute, and contradicts every character of the Turkey, whose females are remarkable for their natural affection, and differ materially in form from the males, whose heads are destitute of the callous substance and whose heels (in the males) are armed with spurs.

ALDRO-
VANDUS;

and
GESNER.

ALDROVANDUS, who died in 1605, draws his arguments from the same source as BELON; I therefore pass him by, and take notice of the greatest of our naturalists GESNER ‡, who falls into a mistake of another kind, and wishes the

* Lib. III. c. 9.

† Lib. X. c. 26.

‡ Av. 481.

Turkey to be thought a native of India. He quotes ÆLIAN for that purpose, who tells us, "That in India are very large poultry not with combs, but with various coloured crests interwoven like flowers, with broad tails neither bending nor displayed in a circular form, which they draw along the ground as peacocks do when they do not erect them; and that the feathers are partly of a gold colour, partly blue, and of an emerald colour"*.

This in all probability was the same bird with the Peacock Pheasant of Mr. EDWARDS, *Le Paon de Tibet* of M. BRISSON, and the *Pavo bicalcaratus* of LINNÆUS. I have seen this bird living. It has a crest, but not so conspicuous as that described by ÆLIAN; but it has those striking colours in form of eyes, neither does it erect its tail like the Peacock †, but trails it like the Pheasant. The *Catreus* of STRABO ‡ seems to be the same bird. He describes it as uncommonly beautiful and spotted, and very like a Peacock. The former author § gives a more minute account of this species, and under the same name. He borrows it from CLITARCHUS, an attendant of ALEXANDER the Great in all his conquests. It is evident from his description, that it was of this kind; and it is likewise probable, that it was the same with his large Indian

* De Anim. lib. XVI. c. 2.

† Edw. II. 67.

‡ Lib. XV. p. 1046

§ De Anim. lib. XVII. c. 23.

poultry before cited. He celebrates it also for its fine note; but allowance must be made for the credulity of *ÆLIAN*. The *Catreus*, or Peacock Pheasant, is a native of Tibet, and in all probability of the north of India, where *CLITARCHUS* might have observed it; for the march of *ALEXANDER* was through that part which borders on Tibet, and is now known by the name of *Penj-ab* or five rivers.

Not natives of Europe; I shall now collect from authors the several parts of the world where Turkies are unknown in the state of nature. Europe has no share in the question; it being generally agreed that they are exotic in respect to that continent.

nor of Asia; Neither are they found in any part of Asia Minor, or the Asiatic Turkey, notwithstanding ignorance of their true origin first caused them to be named from that empire. About Aleppo, capital of Syria, they are only met with, domesticated like other poultry*. In Armenia they are unknown, as well as in Persia; having been brought from Venice by some Armenian merchants into that empire†, where they are still so scarce as to be preserved among other rare fowl in the royal menagery‡.

DU HALDE acquaints us, that they are not natives of China; but were introduced there from other

* *RUSSEL*, 63.

† *TAVERNIER*, 146.

‡ *BELL's Travels*, I. 128.

countries. He errs from misinformation in saying that they are common in India.

I will not quote GEMELLI CARERI, to prove that they are not found in the Philippine Islands, because that gentleman with his pen travelled round the world in his easy chair, during a very long indisposition and confinement * in his native country.

But DAMPIER bears witness that none are found in Mindanao †.

nor Africa;

The hot climate of Africa barely suffers these birds to exist in that vast continent, except under the care of mankind. Very few are found in Guinea, except in the hands of the Europeans, the negroes declining to breed any on account of the great heats §. PROSPER ALPINUS satisfies us, they are not found either in Nubia or in Egypt. He describes the Meleagrids of the ancients, and only proves that the Guinea hens were brought out of Nubia, and sold at a great price at Cairo ||; but is totally silent about the Turkey of the moderns.

Let me in this place observe, that the Guinea hens have long been imported into Britain. They were cultivated in our farm-yards; for I discover in 1277, in the Grainge of Clifton, in the

* Sir JAMES PORTER's *Obs. Turkey*, I. i. 321.

† BARBOT in CHURCHILL's *Coll.* V. 29.

§ BOSMAN, 229.

|| *Hist. Nat. Ægypti*, I. 201.

parish of Ambrosden in Buckinghamshire, among other articles, six *Mutilones* and six *Africanæ feminae**, for this fowl was familiarly known by the names of *Afra Avis* and *Gallina Africana* and *Numida*. It was introduced into Italy from Africa, and from Rome into our country. They were neglected here by reason of their tenderness and difficulty of rearing. We do not find them in the bills of fare of our ancient feasts †; neither do we find the Turkey: which last argument amounts to almost a certainty, that such a hardy and princely bird had not found its way to us. The other likewise was then known by its classical name; for that judicious writer Doctor CAIUS describes, in the beginning of the reign of ELIZABETH, the Guinea fowl, for the benefit of his friend GESNER, under the name of *Meleagris*, bestowed on it by ARISTOTLE ‡.

Having denied, on the very best authorities, that the Turkey ever existed as a native of the old world, I must now bring my proofs of its being only a native of the new, and of the period in which it first made its appearance in Europe.

but of
America,

The first precise description of these birds is given by OVIEDO, who in 1525 drew up a summary of his greater work, the History of the

* KENNET's Parochial Antiq. 287.

† Neither in that of GEORGE NEVIL nor among the delicacies mentioned in the Northumberland household book begun in the beginning of the reign of HENRY VIII.

‡ CAII Opusc. 13. Hist. An. lib. VI, c. 2.

the islands,

Indies, for the use of his monarch CHARLES V. This learned man had visited the West Indies and its islands in person, and payed particular regard to the natural history. It appears from him, that the Turkey was in his days an inhabitant of the greater islands, and of the main-land. He speaks of them as Peacocks; for being a new bird to him, he adopts that name from the resemblance he thought they bore to the former. "But," says he, "the neck is bare of feathers, "but covered with a skin which they change "after their phantasie into diverse colours. They "have * a horn as it were on their front, and "haire on the breast †." He describes other birds which he also calls Peacocks. They are of the gallinaceous genus, and known by the name of Curassao birds, the male of which is black, the female ferruginous.

Mexico,

The next who speaks of them as natives of the main-land of the warmer parts of America, is FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ, sent there by PHILIP II. to whom he was physician. This naturalist observed them in Mexico. We find by him, that the Indian name of the male was Huexolotl, of the female Cihuatotolin. He gives them the title of Gallus Indicus and Gallo Pavo. The Indians, as well as Spaniards, domesticated these useful birds. He speaks of the size by comparison, saying, that the wild were twice the magnitude of

* In the Spanish Peçon corto.

† In PURCHAS, III. 995.

the tame; and that they were shot with arrows or guns*. I cannot learn the time when FERNANDEZ wrote. It must be between the years 1555 and 1598, the period of PHILIP's reign.

Darien,

PEDRO DE CIESA mentions Turkies on the Isthmus of Darien†. LERY, a Portuguese author, asserts, that they are found in Brazil, and gives them an Indian name‡; but since I can discover no traces of them in that diligent and excellent naturalist MARCGRAVE, who resided long in that country, I must deny my assent. But the former is confirmed by that able and honest navigator DAMPIER, who saw them frequently, as well wild as tame, in the province of Yucatan§, now reckoned part of the kingdom of Mexico.

Yucatan,

North
America.

In North America they were observed by the very first discoverers. When RENÉ DE LAUDONNIERE, patronized by Admiral COLIGNI, attempted to form a settlement near the place where Charlestown now stands, he met with them on his first landing in 1564, and by his historian has represented them with great fidelity in the fifth plate of the recital of his voyage||: from his time the witnesses to their being natives of the continent are innumerable. They have been seen in flocks of hundreds in all parts from Louisiana

* Hist. Av. Nov. Hisp. 27.

† Seventeen Years Travels, 20.

‡ In DE LAET's Descr. des Indes, 491.

§ Voyages, vol. II. part II. p. 65. 85. 114.

|| DE BRY.

even to Canada; but at this time are extremely rare in a wild state, except in the more distant parts, where they are still found in vast abundance.

When first introduced into Europe. It was from Mexico or Yucatan that they were first introduced into Europe; for it is certain, that they were imported into England as early as the year 1524, the 15th of HENRY VIII *.

We probably received them from Spain, with which we had great intercourse till about that time. They were most successfully cultivated in our kingdom from that period; inasmuch, that they grew common in every farm-yard, and became even a dish in our rural feasts by the year 1585; for we may certainly depend on the word of old RUSSEY, in his Account of the Christmas Husbandry Fare †.

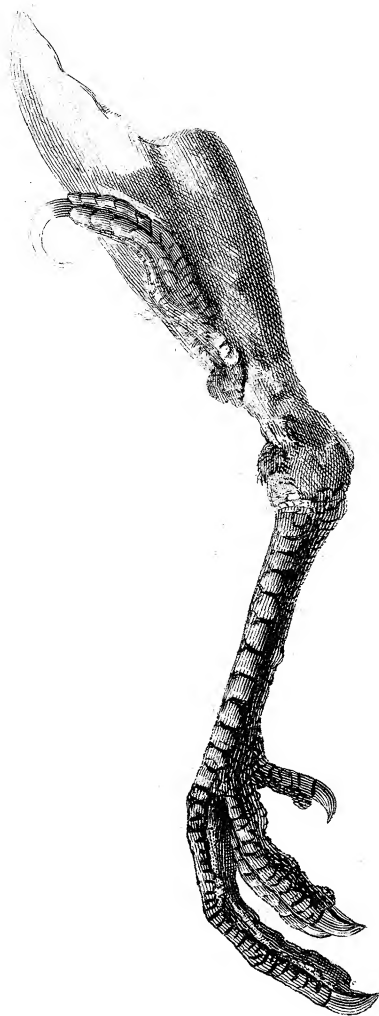
Beefe, Mutton, and Porke, fhred pies of the best,
Pig, Veale, Goose, and Capon, and Turkie well drest,
Cheese, Apples, and Nuts, jolie carols to heare,
As then in the cuntry, is counted good cheare.

But at this very time they were so rare in France, that we are told, that the very first which was eaten in that kingdom appeared at the nuptial feast of CHARLES IX. in 1570 ‡.

* BAKER'S CHR. ANDERSON'S Dict. Com. I. 354. HACKLUYT, II. 165. makes their introduction about the year 1532. BARNABY GOOGE, one of our early writers on Husbandry, says, they were not seen here before 1530. He highly commends a Lady HALES of Kent, for her excellent management of these fowl, p. 166.

† Five Hundred Points of good Husbandry, p. 57.

‡ ANDERSON'S Dict. Comm. I. 410.



To this account I beg leave to lay before you the very extraordinary appearance on the thigh of a Turkey, bred in my poultry yard, and which was killed a few years ago for the table. The servant in plucking it was very unexpectedly wounded in the hand. On examination the cause appeared so singular, that the bird was brought to me. I discovered, that from the thigh-bone issued a short upright process, and to that grew a large and strong toe, with a sharp and crooked claw, exactly resembling that of a rapacious bird.

